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ABSTRACT

A study examined the administration of college forensics programs, comparing the current (1990) status of programs to the status of such programs one year ago and five years ago. The study was based on the philosophy that if forensics programs have changed, more than likely they have changed in terms of what activities are offered to students, and therefore, of how the program is administered. Surveys were mailed to 374 forensics program administrators at colleges and universities in the United States and 155 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 44%. Results indicated that nearly half of the programs that currently offer only individual events used to offer debate as well. Thus, in the last 5 years, many schools have had to make choices regarding the direction of their program, and most directors seem to have selected individual events as the activity that they will continue to sponsor. The number of debate-only schools has remained relatively stable over the past 5 years, as have the number of schools with both debate and individual events programs. Survey results suggest that as long as the individual events and debate programs have adequate resources, their existence in the forensics community will continue to be fairly stable. (One figure, four additional pie charts, and one table of data are included. The questionnaire regarding the status of forensics programs is appended. (MG)

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STATUS OF FORENSICS PROGRAMS: A SURVEY

Paper presented to the Forensics Division
at the 1990 Speech Communication Association National Conference

by

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STATUS OF FORENSICS PROGRAMS: A SURVEY

As forensics coaches, judges and enthusiasts entering a new decade of competition in intercollegiate forensics, we face a myriad of challenges. Forensic educators have recently lamented about problems regarding forensics budgets, the decline of NDT debate, and coach/judge burnout (Littlefield, 1989; Rowland and Deatherage, 1988; Underberg, 1989). On a more positive note, forensics seems to be thriving, with new schools participating in debate and individual events every year (Freeley, 1986). Thus, as forensics programs enter the 1990's, it seems appropriate to examine the current status of the programs in order to assess what the next ten years might bring to the activity.

Currently, very little research exists to suggest the direction forensics programs will take in the future. In 1987, Stepp and Thompson conducted a survey of the status of forensics programs in order to aid institutions in fund raising ventures. The study was useful in determining reasons for participation in debate and/or individual events, how much cross-over existed between the two activities, and the size of the budget in relation to the size of the program. This study, however, neither indicated what those programs were like in the past nor what changes had or could be expected to occur.

While a study of the future of forensics programs could be approached from a variety of angles, our approach is to examine the administration of forensics programs, comparing the current status of programs to the status of such programs one year ago and five years ago. Our philosophy is that if forensics programs have changed, more than likely they have changed in terms of what activities are offered to students, and therefore, how the program is administered.

METHOD

Surveys of forensics programs were mailed to 375 colleges and universities in the United States. Addresses were obtained through mailing lists from the National Forensic Association, National Debate Tournament, and Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha. Respondents were asked to indicate what type of program currently existed at their school: individual events-only, debate-only, individual events and debate with one director, both individual events and debate with separate directors, or "other". The respondents were also asked to indicate which type of program existed at their respective schools one year ago and five years ago. In addition, respondents were asked to provide some demographic information so comparisons could be made between types of programs. Finally, an open-ended section required respondents to comment on the advantages and disadvantages of their type of program. (These comments are not included in this paper so as to allow panel participants the opportunity to voice their positions without bias.) Ten of the surveys were returned unopened because of inaccurate addresses; 155 completed surveys were returned, for a response rate of 44%.

A trained coder tabulated the results according to type of program (i.e, individual events-only [22 responses]; debate-only [25 responses]; both activites, one director [75 responses]; both activities, separate directors [17 responses]; or "other" [16 responses]). For each different type of program, the coder tabulated what the program was like one year ago and five years ago. Additionally, the type of institution, the size of the institution, the size of the forensics squad and staff, and the budget were recorded utilizing the same cutoff criteria provided on the survey (See Appendix A for copy of the survey). Reliability of the coding was checked by examining fifteen of the surveys (10 percent); it was found to be 100% accurate.

RESULTS

Current Status of Programs

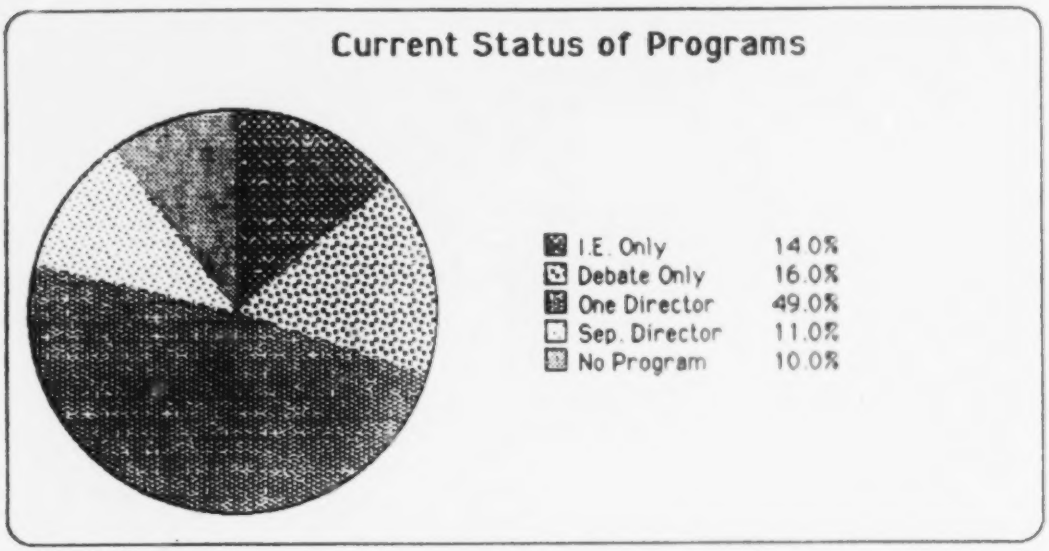


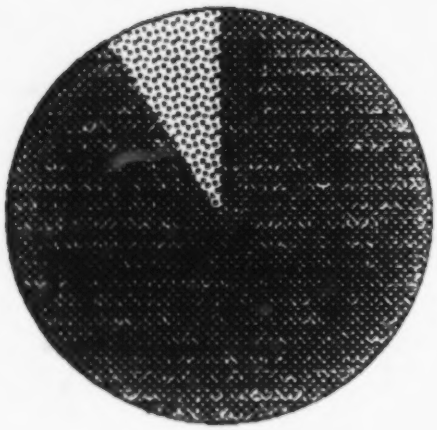
Fig. 1.1

Figure 1.1 summarizes the current status or type of program offered. The changes in type or status of programs, from 1989 (one year ago) and 1985 (five years ago), are categorized by type of current program and reflected in the following pie charts (See pp. 4-7).

No graphic portrayal is provided for the "other" or "no program" descriptor as the small number and diversity of responses precluded meaningful comparisons.

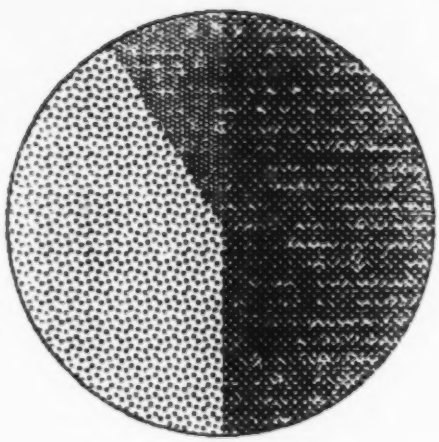
Individual Event Programs

I.E. : One Year Ago



I.E. Only	91.0%
I.E./Debate : One Director	9.0%

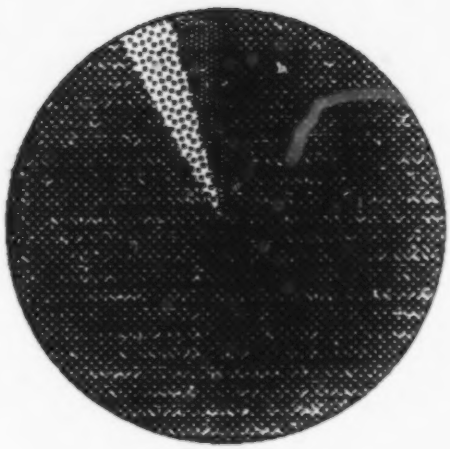
I.E. : Five Years Ago



I.E. Only	50.0%
I.E./Debate	41.0%
No Program	9.0%

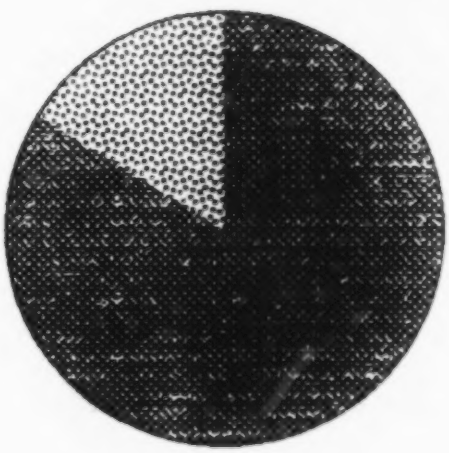
Debate Programs

Debate: One Year Ago



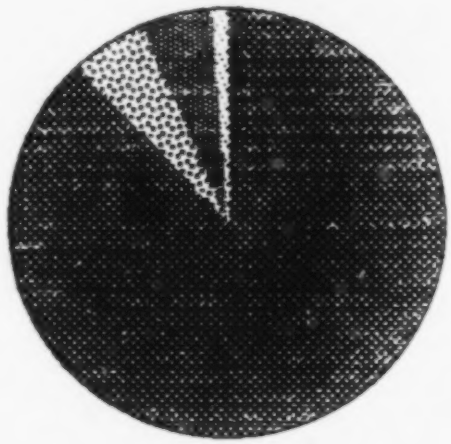
Debate	92.0%
I.E./Debate	4.0%
No Program	4.0%

Debate: Five Years Ago



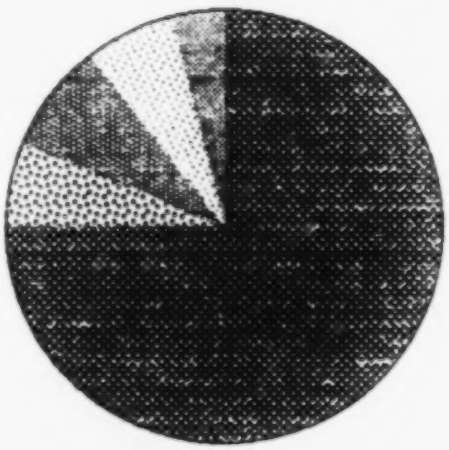
Debate	84.0%
I.E./Debate	16.0%

I.E./Debate: One Director- One Year Ago



Same/ One Director	88.0%
Separate Directors	5.5%
I.E. Only	5.5%
Debate Only	1.0%

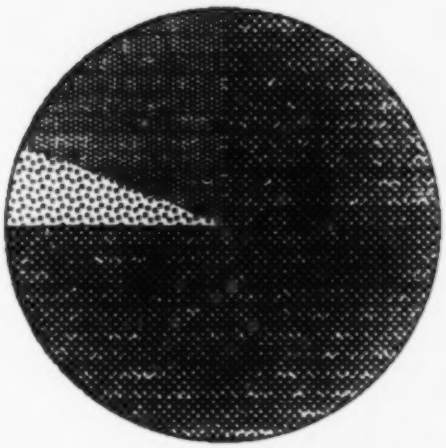
I.E./Debate: One Director-Five Years Ago



Same/ One Director	75.0%
Separate Directors	6.5%
I.E. Only	8.0%
Debate Only	6.5%
No Program	4.0%

I.E./Debate: Separate Directors

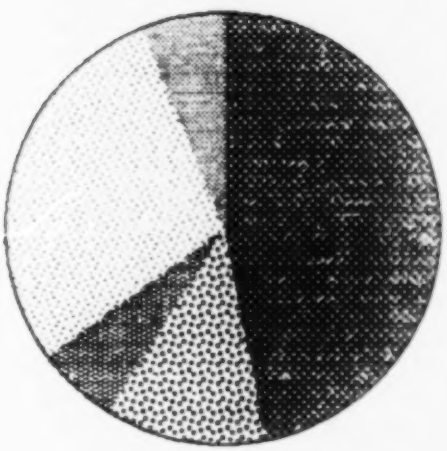
-One Year Ago



Separate Director	75.0%
I.E. Only	6.0%
One Director	19.0%

I.E./Debate: Separate Directors

-Five Years Ago



Separate Director	47.0%
I.E. Only	12.0%
Debate Only	6.0%
One Director	29.0%
No Response	6.0%

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1.1 summarizes the demographic portion of the survey responses. The specific demographic information focused on the type and size of the institutions surveyed, as well as the size of the program, staff and budget. Institutions were asked to identify themselves as private colleges/universities, two-year colleges/universities or four-year colleges/universities. The size of the institution was measured by the student body population. The size of the program was measured using the number of participants in the program. The staffing of the programs were measured by totalling the number of full-time faculty, part-time faculty (although not identified on the original survey, specified on a number of surveys returned), graduate students and paid assistants. While budget figures were broken down into Individual Events budgets and Debate budgets (where more than one type of program existed), budget figures in Table 1.1 reflect total forensics budget for the school/program.

The delineation of demographic information, by description of the current program offered, allows for comparisons both within categories or types of programs as well as comparisons between categories or types of programs.

CONCLUSIONS

While some of the conclusions that can be drawn from this survey are not startling, the results do point to some interesting trends in forensics. The most noteworthy conclusion is found in the comparison of forensics programs from 1985. Initially, it appears that individual events programs are developing and increasing in number. However, a closer examination reveals that nearly half of the programs that currently offer only individual events used to offer debate as well. Thus, in the past five years, many schools have had to make choices regarding the direction of their program, and most directors seem to have selected individual events as the activity that they will continue to sponsor.

A possible explanation for the move toward individual events programs, from previous debate and individual events programs, is found in the budget figures. As Table 1.1 indicates, individual events-only programs operate on very low budgets, from $1,500 to $18,000. Given that debate entry fees can be higher by comparison than individual events fees and that debate tournaments usually last longer, directors-- when forced to choose-- may have ascertained that the individual events activity is more cost-effective.

While there have been some changes in individual events programs, the number of debate only schools has remained relatively stable over the past five years, as have the number of schools with both debate and individual events programs. Our demographic survey results provide some insight into the reasons for this stability.

For example, there were a number of debate-only schools that are located in private colleges (64% vs. 27% for individual events only; 28% for both activities, one director; 12.5% for both activities, separate directors) and because private colleges tend to be smaller, debators may receive more individualized coaching. Additionally, some private colleges surveyed had access to more resources than colleges in the other categories, thereby, making it

easier for those debate programs to be maintained. Even for the debate-only schools located in four-year institutions, the lowest budget was still higher than the lowest figure for any of the other types of programs ($5,527 vs. $1,500 for individual events, $2,000 for both activities, one director; $3,000 for both activities, separate directors).

The stability of the debate and individual events programs can be explained by the fact that they seem to reside in schools that have larger student bodies, more forensics staffing, and more forensics funding than programs in the other categories. Thus, the survey results suggest that as long as the individual events and debate programs have adequate resources, their existence in the forensics community will continue to be fairly stable.

Summary

The results of the survey indicate that there have been some changes in the forensics community in the past five years. The activity will probably not change much in the next few years except that the individual events-only program may continue to replace the programs that now offer both debate and individual events. Unfortunately, surveys such as this do not often tell a complete story. Numbers do not explain why choices are made and alternatives are discarded. A wealth of information could be gained by examining comments made by survey respondents regarding advantages and disadvantages of their program's current administration. Only by studying what forensics educators say about their own programs will we be able to truly get an understanding of the future of this activity.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE REGARDING THE STATUS OF FORENSICS PROGRAMS

I. General Information. Please answer the following about your school. These responses are optional.

A. University/College Information

1. Type of institution?
_____ private college/university
_____ two-year college/university
_____ four-year college/university

2. Size of institution?
_____ fewer than 500 students
_____ 500 to 1,000 students
_____ 1,000 to 5,000 students
_____ 5,000 to 10,000 students
_____ 10,000 to 25,000 students
_____ more than 25,000 students

B. Forensics Program Information

1. What staffng does your forensics program provide for?
Number of full-time faculty _____
Number of graduate students _____
Number of paid assistants _____

2. What is the approximate total budget of your forensics program? If your program is comprised of individual events and debate (either together or under separate directors), please indicate the amount allocated to each.
Total Budget _____
Individual Events Budget _____
Debate Budget _____

3. How many students participate in forensics at your school? _____

II. Forensics Administration

A. What type of forensics program currently exists at your school?

_____ Individual Events only
_____ Debate only
_____ Individual Events and Debate, administered by separate directors (one director for individual events, one for debate)
_____ Individual Events and Debate, administered by one director
_____ There is no forensics program at our school
_____ Other (please specify)

B. What type of forensics program existed at your school one year ago?

_____ Individual Events only
_____ Debate only
_____ Individual Events and Debate, administered by separate directors (one director for individual events, one for debate)
_____ Individual Events and Debate, administered by one director
_____ There was no forensics program at our school
_____ Other (please specify)

C. What type of forensics program existed at your school five years ago?

_____ Individual Events only
_____ Debate only
_____ Individual Events and Debate, administered by separate directors (one director for individual events, one for debate)
_____ Individual Events and Debate, administered by one director
_____ There was no forensics program at our school
_____ Other (please specify)

D. Answer the following question which best pertains to you.

D-1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of your individual events only program?

OR

D-2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of your debate only program?

OR

D-3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of your individual events and debate program administered by separate directors?

OR

D-4. What are the advantages of your individual events and debate program administered by one director?

OR

D-5. If your program is not administered in any of the ways described above, please describe your program and the advantages and disadvantages of the way it is administered.

(Table 1.1)

DEMOGRAPHICS: By Program Type

CRITERIA \ PROGRAMS	I.E. ONLY	DEBATE ONLY	BOTH/ ONE DIRECTOR
Institution Type			
Private	27.00%	64.00%	28.00%
Two Year	18.00%	0	5.00%
Four Year	55.00%	36.00%	67.00%
Size of Institution			
< 500	5.00%	4.00%	0
501-1000	14.00%	4.00%	9.50%
1001-5000	38.00%	44.00%	30.00%
5001-10000	24.00%	12.00%	13.50%
10001-25000	19.00%	32.00%	42.00%
25001 >	0	4.00%	5.00%
Participants			* No Response 1.5%
0-5	4.50%	4.00%	1.50%
6-10	14.00%	24.00%	8.00%
11-20	45.50%	52.00%	28.00%
21-30	27.00%	16.00%	25.00%
31-40	0	0	12.00%
40 +	9.00%	4.00%	24.00%
Staff			
Full-Time	28	26	97
Part-Time	2	0	5
Graduate	11	21	46
Paid Assistant	3	9	37
Total:	44	56	185
Average:	2.00	2.24	2.47
Budget			
Range	$1,500 -18,000.00	$5,527-90,000.00	$2,000-74,100.00
Mean	$7527.00	$23,157.00	$19,800.00
Median	$7000.00	$18,000.00	$14,300.00

BOTH/ SEPARATE DIRECTORS

12.00%
12.00%
76.00%

0
0
41.00%
17.75%
23.50%
17.75%

0
0
18.00%
11.50%
35.00%
24.00%

11.50%
36
5
16
4

61
3.6

$3,000-45,000.00
$18,700.00
$16,000.00